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ABSTRACT

The communication discipline has advanced the belief that arguing (high argumentativeness) is a constructive communication activity. Recent research efforts have attempted the integration of principles from argumentation, interpersonal communication, and conflict management, and several benefits of high motivation to argue and skill in informal arguing have been identified. Three instructional methods designed to enhance motivation and skill in argumentative communication are: (1) D. A. Infante's inventional system; (2) cognitive training in interpersonal conflict; and (3) the use of rhetorical topoi. Infante's two-part inventional system advocates the use of informative, persuasive and argumentative components, while the cognitive training model employs the argumentative construct in conflict management instruction. The use of topoi (or topical review) uses a specific device of thought to help generate ideas relevant to a subject. Efforts at determining the superiority of a cognitive, a behavioral or a mixed method approach to training in informal argument deserve further investigation. These three programs reflect different orientations, and should be tested against each other. (Twenty-seven references are attached.) (RAE)

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ENHANCING TRAIT ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND SKILL IN ARGUING: A REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

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ENHANCING TRAIT ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND SKILL IN ARGUING: A REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

ABSTRACT

The communication discipline has advanced the belief that arguing is a constructive communication activity. Recently, research efforts have attempted the integration of principles from argumentation, interpersonal communication, and conflict management. Several benefits of high motivation to argue and skill in informal arguing have been identified.

This paper reviews three instructional methods designed to enhance motivation and skill in argumentative communication. Empirical research which supports each method is presented. Suggestions for future research comparing the differential benefits of each method are offered.

ENHANCING TRAIT ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND SKILL IN ARGUING: A REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Since antiquity the communication discipline has studied arguing and argumentative communication. From Aristotle's Rhetoric to contemporary relational, rhetorical and argumentation theoretical perspectives, the discipline has advanced the notion that arguing is a constructive communication activity. This focus on argumentative behavior appears warranted. Argumentative behavior is a ubiquitous form of communication observed in many interaction contexts. Arguing is an essential feature of the legislative and judicial process, and a pervasive feature in interpersonal decision-making, conflict management, and conflict resolution attempts.

Several approaches to studying argumentative behavior have developed over the centuries. Rhetorical theorists have formulated principles of argumentation. Traditionally, those principles developed from, and were applied to, more formal communication contexts. Rhetorical critics have studied the "great political debates," as well as other formal argumentative behaviors in the careers of important public speakers.

Until recently, research efforts designed to study argumentative communication in informal contexts have been less robust. Interpersonal and behavioral science interest in argument pales in comparison to the humanistic and rhetorical scholars' emphasis on argumentative communication.

Interest in argument in less formal, relational contexts was stimulated by scholars studying communication and social conflict (e.g., Miller & Simons, 1974). Several approaches to studying informal argument have been advanced (e.g., O'Keefe, 1977; Trapp & Hoff, 1985; Trapp, Hoff & Chandler, 1987; Willard, 1976).

It has been suggested that argumentation and interpersonal conflict differ along several lines (Trapp, Hoff & Chandler, 1987). Argumentation research has focused on social and philosophical settings, while interpersonal and social conflict research has focused on personal settings. The study of argumentation is usually limited to monologue, while interpersonal and conflict has been studied from a dialogic perspective. Argumentation research stresses content, while interpersonal communication has placed greater emphasis on the relational aspects of communication. The argumentation approach stresses a "win-lose" outcome. That is, those engaged in argument enter the interaction with an expectation to "win" the argument. The interpersonal conflict research perspective has placed less emphasis on a "win-lose" orientation and greater emphasis on compromise, cooperation, negotiation, and "win-win" outcomes.

Recent efforts have attempted to integrate the areas of argumentation, interpersonal communication, and social conflict (e.g., Hample & Dallinger, 1987; Infante, 1988; Trapp & Hoff, 1985; Trapp, Hoff & Chandler, 1987; Schultz & Anderson, 1984; Anderson, Schultz & Courtney Staley, 1987). Infante (1988) notes that "argumentation and interpersonal communication are complementary areas of communication" (p. viii). Trapp and Hoff

(1985) suggest that argument is "a serial episode that occurs and recurs in people's everyday lives" (p. 1). Trapp, Hoff and Chandler (1987) note that arguing "is a phenomenon that occurs in the lives of everyday people" (p. 11).

Several researchers are studying the characteristics, structure, form, materials, process, and outcomes of informal argument. Trapp, Hoff and Chandler (1987) provide an extensive review of these research efforts. One line of research cited as contributing to the normative perspective on interpersonal argumentation is Infante and Rancer's (1982) conceptualization of argumentativeness.

A Conceptualization of Argumentativeness

Infante and Rancer (1982) developed a trait approach to understanding argumentative communication. Argumentativeness is defined as a generally stable trait which predisposes individuals in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions that others take on those issues (Infante & Rancer, 1982). This construct has been distinguished conceptually and empirically from verbal aggressiveness. In verbal aggressiveness, individuals may attack an adversary's self-concept instead of, or in addition to, his or her position on an issue (Infante & Wigley, 1986).

This trait approach to studying informal argument has focused on what arguing means to the individual in terms of motivation and perceptions. The general trait to be argumentative, (ARGgt), is conceptualized as a function of two

competing motivational tendencies, motivation to approach arguments, (ARGap), and motivation to avoid arguments, (ARGav). The more the approach motivation exceeds the avoidance motivation, the more the individual is argumentative.

In addition to the trait component, the Infante and Rancer (1982) model of argumentativeness includes situational factors so as to more accurately predict motivation to argue in a given situation. While a person's argumentative trait is predictive of the total pattern of argumentative behaviors, perceptions of the particular situation has an impact on argumentative behavior. Thus, an individual's motivation for participating in a given argument is a joint product of both trait and situational influences. A study by Infante (1987) demonstrated that inclusion of situational perceptions increases our ability to predict an individual's resultant motivation to argue in that situation.

Benefits of Argumentativeness

Recent research has uncovered several benefits of high motivation to argue. Arguing stimulates curiosity and increases learning because we seek out more information on the issues we argue about. Arguing reduces ego-centric thinking and forces us to explore issues from multiple perspectives (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). Moreover, arguing enhances social perspective-taking, which is related to persuasiveness (Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982).

High argumentatives are also seen as more dynamic, more expert, and more interested in communication (Infante, 1981).

High argumentatives are less likely to be provoked into verbal aggression (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd & Seeds, 1984). High motivation and skill in arguing have been related to perceptions of communication competence (Infante, 1985; Onyekwere, Rubin, & Infante, 1987). Perceived communicator credibility has been associated with higher levels of argumentativeness (Infante, 1985; Schultz, 1982). Infante (1985) found that influencing women to be more argumentative resulted in increased credibility. Leadership in group situations is also associated with high argumentatives (Schultz, 1982).

Being high in trait argumentativeness also appears to have benefits in the organizational context. Subordinates reported greater job satisfaction when they perceived their superiors as high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness (Infante & Gorden, 1985a). Superiors who were more argumentative also reported higher salaries and more job satisfaction (Infante & Gorden, 1985b).

Increasing motivation and skill in argument may reduce a person's tendency toward verbal aggressiveness (Infante & Rancer, 1982; Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984). Verbal aggressiveness has been labeled a destructive and counterproductive communication trait (Infante, 1988). Infante (1988) proposes that verbal aggressiveness may be the result of social learning and/or an argumentative skill deficiency. The skill deficiency explanation of verbal aggression asserts that if individuals have not developed high motivation and skill in arguing, they may have little choice but to engage in verbal aggression (Infante, 1988). When powerful attack and defend

needs are stimulated during social conflict situations, the individual low in argumentativeness may have to resort to verbally aggressive messages to satisfy those needs.

Efforts Designed to Enhance Motivation and Skill in Argument

As noted, research indicates that there are numerous personal and professional benefits of high argumentativeness. Given this, it would be beneficial to understand instructional efforts designed to enhance trait argumentativeness. Recent efforts at enhancing trait argumentativeness and skill in argumentative communication have taken several approaches. Three approaches have been employed to increase individuals motivation to argue (ARGgt), and enhance their skill in argument.

Infante's Inventional System

Infante (1988) offers a two-part inventional system designed to enhance individuals motivation and skill in arguing. In Part One he advocates the use of informative, persuasive and argumentative components to motivation and skill enhancement in argument.

The informative component of the model involves helping individuals state the controversy in propositional form. This is done in order to let the adversaries know where they stand on the issue. Following a traditional argumentation model, the nature of the controversy is stated in propositional form (e.g., Resolved: "That this family should buy a new car. When the controversy is stated in propositional form, the parties can "agree upon what to disagree" (Infante, 1988, p. 42).

The persuasive component of the model involves the individuals explaining their position on the controversial issue, and inventing arguments to support their position. Infante (1988) advocates the use of this Inventional System (Problem-Blame-Solution-Consequences), often referred to as the "problem-solution" format. This inventional system requires the individual to ask such questions as: "What are the signs of a problem?" "What causes the problem?" "What are the possible solutions to the problem?" and "What favorable outcomes will result from the solution?" (Infante, 1988, p. 47).

The argumentative component of the model includes techniques for presenting and defending arguments, as well as techniques for attacking adversaries positions on issues. Four-step procedures are outlined to present and defend arguments as well as to attack the arguments of others (Infante, 1988).

Additional components are also advocated in the model. These include analyzing an opponent's message structure tactics such as the placement of disliked evidence sources, managing your credibility, enhancing verbal and nonverbal presentational ability, and the use of language tactics (i.e., definitions, clarity, provisionalism). The aim of these tactics is to enhance the chance of "winning" the argument.

In the second part of his inventional system, Infante (1988) employs a "cued argument" procedure to influence individuals to be more argumentative. The assumption behind this procedure is that in order to be more argumentative, an individual must have available (or be able to generate) a sufficient number of

arguments for the topic under dispute. They also must be motivated to use those arguments in social conflict situations (Infante, 1985). This cued argument procedure is consistent with the psychological approach taken by argumentativeness research which focuses on how a person's argumentative behavior is responded to by others (Infante, 1985).

In a laboratory situation, Infante (1985) tested the cued argument procedure. A group of high and low argumentative women were divided into two treatment conditions. In the "cued argument" condition, individuals were provided with a number of arguments relevant to the topic, and were told to use those arguments in a forthcoming discussion.

In this procedure, participants were provided with ten lines of argument. They were told not to use the arguments verbatim, but as a framework for guiding what to say. In the uncued condition, participants were merely told to try and convince their partner. It was reasoned that the quality of the participants arguments in the cued condition would be perceived more favorably, and that cued subjects would be seen as more willing to argue.

Results indicated that cued subjects were perceived more favorably than uncued subjects on expertise, dynamism, quality of arguments and willingness to argue. More importantly, low argumentatives who were cued with lines of argument were perceived more favorably on expertise and dynamism than low argumentatives who were not cued. Thus, inducing low argumentatives (women) to argue had a clear influence on enhancing their perceived credibility during an argument.

The "cued argument" procedure appears to enhance an individuals perceived credibility during an argument by enhancing their argumentativeness. This procedure demands greater attention by researchers and teachers attempting to influence motivation and skill in argument.

Cognitive Training in Interpersonal Conflict

Schultz and Anderson (1984) and Anderson, Schultz and Courtney Staley (1987) have incorporated the argumentativeness construct in their efforts at instruction in conflict management. Using the assumptions of the argumentativeness construct (Infante & Rancer, 1982) they argue that "if one is to resolve a conflict situation, one will have to be argumentative; that is, be willing to argue in one's own behalf, providing information and reasoning, asserting conclusions, and refuting positions that others are asserting" (Schultz & Anderson, 1984, p. 338).

Schultz and Anderson (1982) concluded that the use of cognitive materials can affect changes in attitudes toward argumentativeness. They conducted a study which indicated that low argumentative subjects' willingness to engage in argument significantly increased after exposure to cognitive material emphasizing the positive value of argument.

Three assumptions are inherent in this cognitive training model: (1) Conflict management requires a willingness to be argumentative; (2) Substantial cognitive data must be presented in order to change unfavorable perceptions of conflict and argumentativeness; and (3) After negative perceptions are altered, skill in conflict management can be taught using a model

drawing upon theories of argumentation and persuasion (Anderson, Schultz & Courtney Staley, 1987).

The Schultz and Anderson (1984) model is used in a series of lecture-discussion training sessions. The training first presents cognitive material on: (1) perceptions of conflict; and (2) perceptions of argumentativeness. The training then proceeds with a model of conflict management. The first part of the model helps participants determine whether a conflict exists. A three-step procedure for managing conflict is offered. Step 1 involves determining the issues of the dispute. Step 2 involves determining the goals one wishes to attain. Step 3 involves the selection of a direction (argument, persuasion, agitation) and a strategy (avoidance, diffusion, confrontation) to best achieve the goals. The final part of the training involves practice conflict management sessions.

Anderson, Schultz and Courtney Staley (1987) report a study in which an experimental group received this cognitive training in argumentativeness and conflict management, while a control group did not. The training occurred over a three-week period. The results of the study indicated that the cognitive training in argumentativeness and conflict management enhanced subjects argumentativeness, with low argumentative females reporting the greatest change. They state, "Exposing subjects to information that expands and alters their perceptions about argumentativeness and conflict in positive directions will influence them to change their attitudes in positive directions" (Anderson, Schultz & Courtney Staley, 1987, p. 64).

The Use of Rhetorical Topoi

Another method for the invention of arguments is the topical review. The topical review is a systematic method that uses a specific device of thought (a topos) to help generate ideas relevant to a subject. Topos in Greek means place (or in Roman rhetoric, locus). When used in rhetoric, topos refers to the places a speaker goes to discover arguments. According to Hauser (1986) there are three significant aspects of topical thinking that are suggested by the "place" metaphor. First, topoi are analytic; a topical place provides a means by which one can discover and analyze the various dimensions of a subject. Second, topoi are content-free, and thus, generalizable to all subject matter. Third, they are heuristic in that they assist in the creative process of discovering new ideas for communication. To this list we would add that topoi provide a structure for ideation which stimulates inquiry into unknown avenues of knowledge, pointing to directions that require further investigation.

These places or topics are "labels for superordinate structures of conceptual categories" (Nelson, 1970, p. 122). A series of empirical investigations on the role of topoi in human recall demonstrate the usefulness of this system. While there are a number of different topical cueing reviews (i.e., Bilsky, Hazlett, Streeter & Weaver, 1953; Larson, 1968), each of the studies reviewed used the rhetorical scheme developed by Wilson and Arnold (1983).

Wilson and Arnold's Topical System of Invention

Wilson and Arnold (1983) developed a 16-item review system which is grounded in rhetorical theory, abstract in nature, and "is especially adapted to assisting recall" (Nelson, 1970, p. 124). Wilson and Arnold's list of topics or places is as follows:

A. Attributes commonly discussed

1. Existence or nonexistence of things
2. Degree or quantity of things, forces, etc.
3. Spatial attributes, including adjacency, distribution, place
4. Attributes of time
5. Motion or activity
6. Form, either physical or abstract
7. Substance: physical, abstract, or psychophysical
8. Capacity to change, including predictability
9. Potency: power or energy, including capacity to further or hinder anything
10. Desirability in terms or rewards or punishments
11. Feasibility: workability or practicability

B. Basic relationships commonly asserted or argued

12. Causality: the relation of causes to effects, effects to causes, effects to effects, adequacy of causes, etc.
13. Correlation: coexistence or coordination of things, forces, etc.
14. Genus-species relationships
15. Similarity or dissimilarity

16. Possibility or impossibility

To illustrate, we will use the proposition formulated earlier in this paper, "Resolved: That this family should buy a new car."

Existence: "We don't have a car when we need it--our's is usually at the service station. When we've bought a used car in the past, we've taken on the problems the previous owner didn't want to handle."

Degree: "With a used car, we won't get a warranty, except for perhaps 90 days, and only if we go with a used car dealer."

Spatial: "We've been making frequent, long distance trips and of the last four trips, we've had to call AAA three times."

Time: "Much of our time is wasted waiting for the station or AAA to service the car."

Motion: "The time and money saved would be beneficial."

Form: "A new car would not drop oil stains all over the driveway."

Substance: "We would still remain financially solvent if we bought a new car."

Capacity to change: "A new car would give us more flexibility in our travel schedule."

Potency: "A new car would make us feel more confident on the road. We would no longer restrict ourselves to major highways where AAA could easily find us."

Desirability: "We work hard. We've earned a new car."

Feasibility: "The cost of a new car would be little more than the amount of our current auto repair bills each month."

Correlation: "A new car would eliminate the anxiety and tension we suffer from now with the 'old bomb'."

Genus-species: "Time away from work would be reduced. The bitching about the car would also be reduced."

Similarity: "To continue repairing the old bomb is throwing away good money after bad."

Possibility: "Such a policy would give us a more positive outlook."

We have used the Wilson and Arnold topical review to generate a list of sayables about the proposition. The creation of this list does not take a considerable amount of time. Clearly, some of the arguments elicited are more worthy of development than others. The point is that using this topical review, many lines of argument can come quickly to mind.

Nelson (1970) revealed that when given one hour for recall, subjects using rhetorical topoi with a highly meaningful issues generated 17 percent more items than subjects using free recall. In addition, those subjects working with a less meaningful issue generated 10 percent more items. In another study using groups of students assigned the task of solving a social problem (Nelson, Petelle, & Monroe, 1974), it was found that the groups using the topical review produced significantly more policy statements judged to be more thorough and practical than those generated by the groups working without a topical system. Moreover, the developed solutions of the topical review groups were judged superior to those produced by the other groups. The

results of this study (Nelson, Petelle, & Monroe, 1974) extend Nelson's original research and demonstrate the applicability of this topical system of invention in the small-group setting.

Given the demonstrated usefulness of the topical scheme for generating ideas in both the public and small-group contexts, it would seem profitable to examine the role of rhetorical topoi in assisting individuals in generating arguments in interpersonal contexts, as well as its influence on enhancing motivation and skill in argument.

Conclusions

The communication discipline has promoted the study of argumentation through formal training and pedagogy in argumentation. Indeed, formal high school training in argumentation was found to be the factor which best discriminated high and low argumentatives (Infante, 1982). Motivation and skill in argument appear to be essential components in the management and resolution of social and personal conflict. The construct and measure of argumentativeness helps us define and identify those individuals who may benefit from training and skill enhancement in argumentative communication.

This paper has reviewed several instructional methods which have resulted in enhancing motivation and skill in arguing. Results of this research has provided some empirical support for the utility of these programs to increase willingness to argue and actual argumentative behavior. Intensive, longitudinal training in argument may not always be possible for some individuals whether inside or outside the classroom. Thus,

additional research must be designed to determine which of these programs have the greatest short term and long term advantage on influencing motivation and skill in informal argument.

Efforts at determining the superiority of a cognitive, a behavioral or a mixed method approach to training in informal argument deserve further investigation. The programs reviewed reflect these orientations, and should be tested against each other.

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